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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1219
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 004265

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2016
TAGS: PREL KPAL KWBG JO IS
SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH MEETS WITH ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER
OLMERT

Classified By: CDA Daniel Rubinstein for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a good-spirited meeting with Israeli PM Olmert on June 8, King Abdullah expressed Jordanian opposition to Olmert's unilateral convergence plan and encouraged the GOI to strengthen Abu Mazen. Olmert reassured the King that Israel would heed Jordan's interests in its plans concerning the West Bank. Local Islamists predictably protested Olmert's visit, though no violence was reported. The King attempted to forestall criticism of his meeting with Olmert by strong public statements supporting a Palestinian state and rejecting the notion of Jordan as a substitute Palestinian homeland. END SUMMARY.

POSITIVE WORDS FOR THE PRESS

¶2. (U) Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert traveled to Amman June 8 to meet with King Abdullah and senior Jordanian officials) the first public visit to Jordan by an Israeli prime minister since 2003. Local press reported that the King reiterated Jordan's commitment to helping Israelis and Palestinians resume peace negotiations, as well as the need for the creation of a contiguous, viable Palestinian state. "A two-state solution is the only solution that we should seek. It is a solution that must be achieved through bilateral Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and agreements that are based on the roadmap," the King told the press following his 90-minute meeting with Olmert. King Abdullah said he shared with Olmert concern over the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, and that he looked forward to a "strong partnership for peace" and "more cooperation" between Jordan and Israel. For his part, Olmert told reporters that "Israel is committed to the roadmap and to advancing the bilateral track with the Palestinians. Israel will invest all efforts in order to advance this avenue."

AWAY FROM THE MICROPHONES

¶3. (C/NF) Bassem Awadallah, Director of the King's Office at the royal court, told Charge June 12 that Olmert came to Jordan without any cabinet ministers, and was instead accompanied by his chief of staff Yoram Turbowicz, diplomatic advisor Shalom Turjeman, and "his security advisor (NFI)." Awadallah said there was good chemistry between the two leaders (who already knew each other), and confirmed that Olmert reassured the King that Israel would take Jordan's interests into account in making any moves in the West Bank. Olmert reportedly said that the GOI did not think that bilateral negotiations with PA President Abu Mazen were possible with Hamas in power, but that "bilateral dialogue" was an option.

¶4. (C/NF) Awadallah continued that the King told Olmert of

Jordan's strong concerns over Israel's unilateral convergence plan and its harmful impact on the possibility of achieving a two-state solution. The King emphasized the need for all parties to support Abu Mazen as there was no other Palestinian figure) including prisoner celebre Marwan al-Barghouti) who could take his place. Awadallah said that the King also spoke of the need to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so that moderate states in the region could focus on the "real strategic threat") Iran.

¶15. (C/NF) In addition to the peace process, Olmert and the King also discussed enhanced economic cooperation, including more trade and investment missions and the possibility of constructing an airport in the northern Jordan Valley (around Shuna) for joint Israeli-Jordanian use. Olmert and King Abdullah concluded their meeting by agreeing to stay in close touch.

THE KING SPEAKS OUT

¶16. (U) On the day preceding Olmert's visit to Jordan, King Abdullah delivered a speech to the graduating class of police and army officers at Mu'tah University in the city of Kerak in which he stated: "If there is anyone who believes that it is possible to settle the Palestinian issue at the expense of Jordan, he should know that Jordan will never be a substitute homeland for anybody. The Palestinians, homeland and their state should be on Palestinian soil, and nowhere else." In an interview with Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot) also on June 7) King Abdullah said that he planned to tell Olmert of his opposition to any unilateral steps by Israel that might prejudge final status issues between the GOI and Palestinians. In a clear reference to Olmert's convergence plan, the King said that such moves "would raise question

marks and a sense of insecurity not only among Palestinians, but among all the partners of peace in the region."

ISLAMIST PROTESTS

¶17. (U) As expected, Jordanian Islamists objected strenuously to Olmert's visit. The Islamist-dominated professional associations issued a statement denouncing Olmert's presence in Jordan, and organized a peaceful, small-scale protest demonstration at their offices in Amman. In a separate statement, the Jordan Bar Association) led by its radical anti-Israeli president Saleh Armouti) announced that it "totally rejected" Olmert's visit, and described the Israeli PM as "an extreme Zionist who played a big role in Judaizing Jerusalem when he was its mayor." NOTE: Two days after Olmert's trip to Jordan, the Islamic Action Front) the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) demanded the withdrawal of Jordan's ambassador to Israel in protest of the Israeli shelling of a Gaza beach that resulted in the deaths of Palestinian civilians. END NOTE.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The King's public statements surrounding the Israeli PM's visit were likely designed to forestall criticism of his meeting with Olmert, as well to demonstrate to a skeptical public that Jordan is better able to protect its interests - and to help the Palestinian cause - through direct dialogue with the GOI. His remarks at the graduation speech rejecting Jordan as a "substitute homeland" were probably aimed at allaying the concerns of the Hashemites' traditional East Bank support base, who form the bulk of the security services and continually worry that Jordan will become a de facto Palestinian state. END COMMENT.